

# FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIANITY

## (Authoritarian Church vs Agape Kingdom)

In the First Century AD, prior to Christianity, Israel was looking for a Messiah to re-establish the Davidic Kingdom and overthrow of the Roman military occupation of Israeli territory.<sup>1</sup>

As Joseph's 'son', Jesus was acknowledged to be a 'Son of David'<sup>2</sup> and therefore a legitimate heir of the throne of David. The people had an expectation that this charismatic leader would be their temporal Messiah.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus was a disappointment to them. He refused to take up temporal rule<sup>4</sup>, and instead of preaching a restored Kingdom of Israel he was preaching the Kingdom of Heaven, and clearly stating that his Kingdom was not of this world<sup>5</sup>. His Kingdom was within.<sup>6</sup>

In the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus proclaimed the nearness of the Kingdom, performed miracles, and healed the sick, and charged his disciples to do the same<sup>7</sup>. He offered rebirth in the Holy Spirit to enable people to experience the Kingdom of Heaven<sup>8</sup>.

He also turned the concept of authority upside down.<sup>9</sup>

After Jesus physical departure, we see a First Century Christianity begin to emerge with Peter, James, and John continuing for a time following Jesus in the Spirit<sup>10</sup>.

Then according to Acts, James was killed by Herod<sup>11</sup>, and Peter and John apparently ceded the leadership of Jesus Church to another James, this James being Jesus brother.

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1 **Act 1:6** Then, indeed, these coming together, they asked Him, saying, Lord, do You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

2 **Luke 2:4** And Joseph also went up from Galilee to be taxed (out of *the* city of Nazareth, into Judea, to *the* city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of *the* house and family line of David).

3 **Joh 12:12** On the next day, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, a great crowd who had come to the Feast **13** took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him. And *they* cried, Hosanna! "Blessed is the King of Israel who comes in *the* name of *the* Lord!"

4 **Joh 6:15** Therefore when Jesus perceived that they would come and take Him by force, that they might make Him a king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain alone *by* Himself.

5 **John 18:36** Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would fight so that I might not be delivered to the Jews. But now My kingdom is not from here.

6 **Luk 17:21** Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

7 **Mat 10:7** And as you go, proclaim, saying, The kingdom of Heaven is at hand. **10:8** Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. You have received freely, freely give.

8 **Joh 3:5** Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

9 **Mat 20:25** But Jesus called them and said, You know that the rulers of the nations exercise dominion over them, and they who are great exercise authority over them. **26** However, it shall not be so among you. But whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant.

10 **Act 2:38** Then Peter said to them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ to remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **39** For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all those afar off, as many as *the* Lord our God shall call.

11 **Act 12:1** And at that time Herod the king threw on *his* hands to oppress some of those of the church. **2** And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

As Jesus was Son of David, so was James, and consequently James was also a legitimate heir to a re-established Davidic dynasty. But James does not see that the work of Jesus means forsaking the performance of the Jewish Law.<sup>12</sup>

Jesus vision of the Kingdom of God as not of this world is replaced by James vision of the restoration of the Davidic, temporal Messianic Kingdom, a Kingdom where non-Jews can enter, but only by becoming Jews<sup>13</sup>. Becoming a Jew means circumcision and the keeping of the Law.

In this Church, an authority structure is set in place. Apostolic authority. To be an Apostle, one had to meet the criteria of having accompanied Jesus from the baptism of John to Jesus ascension, as a witness of His resurrection.<sup>14</sup> Apostles were the Authorities within the Church and passed on their Authority to others by the laying on of hands.

Paul is not acknowledged as an Apostle by the Jerusalem hierarchy, he does not meet the criteria. He is given no authority by Jerusalem other than permission to preach the Gospel to the non Jews. However James, who according to the Gospel records also fails to meet the criteria, is nevertheless the leader of the Jerusalem 'Church'. Assumedly this could only be because he is the heir to the Messianic 'throne' of David.

Unlike James, Peter understood that Jesus had changed everything. He no longer kept clean by not associating with Non Jews<sup>15</sup>, he ate with them, and preached a simple message to forgiveness of sins for those who believe in Him, without mention of the Law<sup>16</sup>.

Nevertheless after a visit of a delegation from James, Peter was spooked<sup>17</sup>, and retreated back into Judaism, and to requiring non-Jews to Judaize. He is rebuked by Paul for this<sup>18</sup>.

We will now look at how Paul's own version of events as recorded in his letters is in conflict with the official Church history of Acts, and how Paul's stated theological position is at odds with the Jerusalem Church.

These divergences were syncretised by the Church in the late second Century, and are no longer acknowledged or addressed. They have implications for how one understands Christianity, how one interprets the Bible, and whether one is a citizen of a temporal church or an eternal Kingdom.

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12 **Jam 1:25** But whoever looks into the perfect Law of liberty and continues *in it*, he is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of *the* work. This one shall be blessed in his doing.

13 **Act 15:16** "After this I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David *which* has fallen down; and I will build again its ruins, and I will set it up, **17** so those men who are left might seek after the Lord, and all the nations on whom My name has been called, says the Lord, who does all these things." (James is quoting **Amos 9 vs 11,12**)

14 **Act 1:21** Therefore, it is right that one of these men who have companied with us all *the* time that the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us, **22** beginning from the baptism of John to that same day that He was taken up from us, to become a witness with us of His resurrection.

15 **Act 10:28** And he said to them, You know that it is an unlawful thing for a man, a Jew to keep company with or to come near to one of another nation. But God has shown me not to call any man common or unclean.

16 **Act 10:43** All the Prophets give witness to Him, *that* through His name whoever believes in Him *shall* receive remission of sins.

17 **Gal 2:12** For before some came from James, he ate with the nations. But when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those of the circumcision.

18 **Gal 2:14** But when I saw that they did not walk uprightly with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before all, If you, being a Jew, live as a Gentile, and not as the Jews, why do you compel *the* nations to judaize?

## ***Paul and Church Authority***

**Gal 1:1 Paul, an apostle - not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead**

**2Co 3:1 Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, like some, epistles of commendation to you, or *letters* of commendation from you?**

**Gal 2:6 But from those who seemed to be something (what kind they were then does not matter to me; God does not accept the face of man), for those seeming *important* conferred nothing to me.**

In these passages Paul clearly states that He is an Apostle, but Apostleship has nothing to do with the Church conferring it on him. He received his authority direct from the risen Christ. He needs no letters of Commendation from Jerusalem. The Apostles in Jerusalem are of no consequence to him.

## ***The Jerusalem Conference***

Acts 15 gives an account of a Conference in Jerusalem that has created a template for dealing with internal 'issues' for all versions of authoritarian Christianity ever since.

The trouble is Paul's letters indicate that this account is a total fabrication.

According to Acts it goes like this:

- A minority group of converted Pharisees come to Antioch where Paul is, and they preach on the necessity of Jewish circumcision and keeping Law. (Acts 15 vs 1)
- Paul and Barnabas dispute with them. (Acts 15 vs 2)
- The Antioch Church sends Paul and Barnabas to get a ruling from the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem (Acts 15 vs 2)
- In Jerusalem Peter speaks in defence of Paul's position (Acts 15 vs 7-11)
- Paul and Barnabas also speak in defence of their position (Acts 15 vs 12)
- James hears all submissions and pontificates, clearly states that those preaching circumcision in Antioch had no authority to do so, and hands down a mini law for Gentiles to keep (Acts 15 vs 13-29) that is drafted into a letter
- The Commandments were
  - abstaining from meats offered to idols
  - abstaining from things strangled
  - abstaining from fornication;
- Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch with the letter accompanied by Silas and Judas, 2 senior men from the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15 vs 22 )
- Paul wants to revisit the Churches of his previous missionary journey but has a falling out with Barnabas over who should go (Acts 15 vs 39 ), and takes Silas the Jerusalem delegate instead of Barnabas (Acts 15 vs 40 )
- Paul and Silas revisit the churches, strengthening them (Acts 15 vs 41) and then in Acts 16 we see an accommodating Paul not only circumcising Timothy (Acts 16 vs 3 ) but also delivering the Jerusalem Councils 'decree' to every church they visit (Acts 16 vs 4 )

Paul's version of this episode is contained in Galatians Chapter 2, and is very different.

- In Galatians 2 Paul's trip to Jerusalem is prior to the visit of the Circumcision delegation to Antioch (Galatians 2 vs 11)
- Paul does go to Jerusalem with Barnabas (Galatians 2 vs 1), but he is not sent by the Church in Antioch, he goes of his own volition (Galatians 2 vs 2)
- The meeting in Jerusalem is private and not a public conference (Galatians 2 vs 2)
- Paul makes no mention of any Jerusalem decree, other than a request from Jerusalem that they "remember the poor" (Galatians 2 vs 10)
- Paul does not credit the Jerusalem hierarchy with any authority over him (Galatians 2 vs 6)
- There is clearly dissension between Paul and the circumcision group that comes to Antioch
- The group however are not acting as a rogue element, they 'come from James' (Galatians 2 vs 12)
- Peter's position subsequent to the visit of the men 'from James' is to acquiesce to the premise that Gentiles are required to 'Judaize' to become Christians (Galatians 2 vs 14)
- There is dissension between Paul and Barnabas, however this is not over who goes on a trip, this is because Barnabas like Peter submits to the men 'from James' (Galatians 2 vs 13)
- Paul's attitude to the content of the Acts decree is certainly not what portrays. And he certainly doesn't go about preaching it as per Acts 16 vs 4.

### ***Paul's position on the 'Jerusalem Decrees'***

On the content of the proclamation, we can clearly see where Paul stood from his letters.

The first issue was abstaining from fornication:

**1Thessalonians 4vs3** For this is the will of God, your sanctification, for you to abstain from fornication

Common ground. But what about meats offered to idols?

Paul has no problems with meat offered to idols.<sup>19</sup> He does suggest abstaining however, not to obey any decree from the Church, but so as not to offend the 'weaker brothers'!

**Romans 14 vs 1** And receive him who is weak in the faith, *but* not to judgements of *your* thoughts. 2 For indeed one believes to eat all things; but being weak, *another* eats vegetables.

Who are these weaker brothers? The Apostles in Jerusalem? The Apostles still keeping the Law, led by James the brother of the Lord?

The expression weak in the faith would clearly be offensive to James, especially when Paul has just

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19 **1Cor 10:25** Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no question for conscience' sake; 26 "for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness of it."

aligned the strong with Abraham, the father of the Jews, in the same chapter.

**Rom 4 v 19** And not being weak in faith, he (Abraham) did not consider his own body already dead (being about a hundred years old) or the deadening of Sarah's womb.

### ***So what did the Jamesians think of this?***

The answer lies in the Book of James.

And this brings us to the interesting fact that there is a 'head to head' between the Book of James, and the Epistles of Paul. Here we see the real state of first century Christianity.

One would imagine that the book of Romans and the Epistle of James were simply written as stand alone documents. But a closer look without a blindfold on, shows that this is not the case.

The following is allegedly two independent authors simply stating their own slant on a topic.

Looks more like an adversarial dialogue!

### **Faith and Works**

<b>Paul</b>	<b>James</b>
<b>Rom 3:30</b> since <i>it is</i> one God who will justify circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.	<b>Jam 2:19</b> You believe that there is one God, you do well; even the demons believe and tremble. <b>20</b> But will you know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?
<b>Rom 4:1</b> What then shall we say that our father Abraham has found, according to flesh? <b>2</b> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has a boast; but not before God. <b>3</b> For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness."	<b>Jam 2:21</b> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? <b>22</b> Do you see how faith worked with his works, and from the works faith was made complete? <b>23</b> And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God." <b>24</b> You see then how a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

And there is more of the same between Paul's letters and the book of James.

The first century and second century church texts often contain contain 'heated' dialogue aimed at different factions, but this is not our point.

We are not interested in the bun fight between Paul and the Church in Jerusalem, we are interested in what lies beneath this bun fight.

***Two different gospels and two different Kingdoms.***

Paul's point in Galatians is that as a consequence of being 'bewitched'<sup>20</sup> by the a different gospel (i.e. the gospel of James' Judaizers), the believers in Galatia are attempting to complete what was begun in them by hearing through faith and the free gift of Holy Spirit<sup>21</sup> - 'in the flesh' - in their own power and through their own religious works.<sup>22</sup>

The principle applies today in Authoritarian Churches. Flesh wants to be in control, and wants to do it itself and justify itself. And wants to identify itself by its own good works and knowledge.

Authoritarian Churches distinguish themselves from each other by their 'more Biblically correct' theology; their orthodoxy and their rules. They believe this, they don't believe that – They do this, they don't do that. They don't eat this, and don't wear that etc.<sup>23</sup>

However as both John and Paul clearly point out, Christianity is about the love of God. Our corporate coinherent intimate relationship<sup>24</sup> with the Father<sup>25</sup>, in Christ<sup>26</sup>, through the Holy Spirit<sup>27</sup>.

God is Love<sup>28</sup>. You can study the scriptures<sup>29</sup>, you can follow any number of rules. But its all meaningless without love<sup>30</sup>. Agape love.

**Phil 3:3** For we are the circumcision who worship God in the spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh; **4** though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other thinks that he has reason to trust in the flesh, I more.....

**7** But whatever things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. **8** But no, rather, I also count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them *to be dung*, so that I may win Christ **9** and be found in Him; not having my own righteousness, which is of the Law, but through *the* faith of Christ, the righteousness of God by faith.

**Andrew Moore, Gin Gin Queensland, March 2007 moorea@ozemail.com.au**

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20 **Gal 3:1** O foolish Galatians, who bewitched you not to obey the truth, to whom before *your* eyes Jesus Christ was written among you crucified?

21 **Gal 3:2** This only I would learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by works of *the* law, or by hearing of faith?

22 **Gal 3:3** Are you so foolish? Having begun in *the* Spirit, do you now perfect *yourself* in the flesh?

23 **Col 2:20** If then you died with Christ from the elements of the world, why, as *though* living in *the* world, are you subject to *its* ordinances: **21** touch not, taste not, handle not; **22** which things are all for corruption in the using, according to the commands and doctrines of men?

24 **John 17:21** that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. **22** And I have given them the glory which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one, **23** I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me.

25 **Rom 8:15** For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry, Abba, Father!

26 **Rom 8:39** nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

27 **Rom 5:5** And hope does not make *us* ashamed, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through *the* Holy Spirit given to us.

28 **1Jo 4:16** And we have known and believed the love that God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

29 **Joh 5:39** You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life. And they are the ones witnessing of Me, **40** and you will not come to Me that you might have life.

30 **1Co 13:2** And though I have prophecies, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so as to move mountains, and do not have love, I am nothing.